Review of Secondary Programs

Alberta's Secondary Education Program: The Public's View

Alberta

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REVIEW OF SECONDARY PROGRAMS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I
INTRODUCTION 1

PART II
PURPOSES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION 3

PART III
ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED OF SECONDARY STUDENTS 4
- Language Arts 7
- Mathematics 7
- Social Studies/Social Sciences 8
- Science 8
- Health Education and Personal Development 9
- Languages Other Than English 9
- Fine Arts 10
- Industrial Education, Business Education, and Home Economics 10
- Work Experience and Career Planning 11
- Religious Studies 11
- Computer Literacy/Computer Science 11
- Summary 12

PART IV
HOW STUDENTS LEARN BEST 13

PART V
SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EDUCATION 17

PART VI
SUMMARY 20

APPENDIX A
BRIEFS FROM GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES 22

APPENDIX B
GOALS OF BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALBERTA 26

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McEwen, Nelly, *The Response of Albertans to the Secondary Program Review Questionnaire*. Second Language Services, June, 1984.

Tolman, L.R., *Opinions of Secondary School Students Regarding Objectives of Secondary Education in Alberta*. June, 1984.

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PART

I

INTRODUCTION

On February 9, 1984, the Honourable David King, Minister of Education, announced a major review of the province's secondary education programs. The review was perceived to be necessary for the following reasons:

— as the world becomes more complex and more competitive, quality education is becoming increasingly important;

— there is a need to provide firm direction to the education system; and

— education systems have come under criticism provincially and nationally.

The review is intended to:

— develop a better understanding of the secondary educational system in Alberta; and

— provide for a framework upon which to improve the current secondary educational system.

An important aspect of the Secondary Education Review focuses upon public participation. In 1984, Albertans were invited to present views and express concerns on secondary education issues through the following:

THE QUESTIONNAIRE:

This publication consisted of a mailout, to 856,000 households, of a combined information brochure and opinion survey on the province's secondary school system. Of the nearly 10,000 responses received by Alberta Education, many contained comments in an "open response" section which allowed the public the chance to address concerns not covered by the formal questions. Demographic questions included in the package revealed that a disproportionately high percentage of the adult population responding to the questionnaire were teachers and parents. This result was not unexpected because, although replies were solicited on a voluntary basis, the length of the questionnaire could have discouraged all but those with a special interest in education.

THE OPINIONNAIRE:

This survey of almost 3,000 Grade 10 and 12 students from selected schools across Alberta asked them to rate some 82 educational objectives in terms of importance. Since most of the items were those

that appeared in a similar poll eleven years ago, they provided a useful measure of changing attitudes among the province's youth.

The Gallup Poll:

A Gallup poll of approximately 1,000 adult Albertans included several topics related to the secondary school system. Responses to the poll were sometimes at variance with those of the questionnaire, but the questions asked of the two groups were not always comparable.

The Briefs:

Finally, nearly 200 briefs were sent to Alberta Education, some from individuals, others from government departments, but the majority were from groups with a special interest in education, such as school boards, teachers, and parent groups. Those briefs, considered to represent groups, organizations and government agencies, are listed in Appendix A.

This booklet summarizes the public's views on secondary education under four basic issues: the purposes of secondary education; the content of the curriculum; how students learn best; and the distribution of rights, roles and responsibilities among parents, teachers, Alberta Education, and society at large.

PART

II

PURPOSES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

In 1978, the provincial government responded to public concern about the direction of the school system by approving sixteen goals. Six of these provincial goals were deemed schooling goals: the school system itself should assume the prime responsibility for them. The other ten were classified as educational goals: schools should share the responsibility for achieving these with society at large — parents, churches, industry and business, labour, the media and other community agencies.

Many of the questions asked of the public in the process of the 1984 review of secondary education focused on these 1978 provincial goals: were they the right ones or were there other and more important ones, and had the responsibility been appropriately shared between the school and the community?

Asked to rate all sixteen provincial goals on a five-level scale (from "very unimportant" through "unimportant", "somewhat important", and "important" to "very important"), those surveyed by the 1984 questionnaire felt the most important goal to be the development of communication skills. And in answer to a follow-up question, most respondents (90 per cent) rated this a major *school* responsibility.

The second most important goal according to the 1984 questionnaire was the development of positive self-concepts. Of those respondents, 70 per cent thought that this goal was one to be shared by schools and society.

After communications skills, the most important schooling objective for respondents to the 1984 questionnaire was the acquisition of skills and knowledge in mathematics, the practical and fine arts, sciences, and social studies. Then came the development of learning skills such as organization and analysis.

Not only were all three of these goals considered very important by the majority of respondents, they were also seen as major school responsibilities.

Also important, but not a primary focus for schools according to the responses of Albertans in 1984, were such provincial goals as: developing work skills; civic values, including respect for law and order, public and private property and the rights of others; personal well-being; an interest in cultural, recreational or leisure pursuits; and life skills related to personal financial management or community

involvement. All were considered to be the shared responsibility of schools and society.

Contrary to the government's perceptions in 1978 when the goals were approved, only three of its six schooling goals were seen by questionnaire respondents in 1984 as primarily school responsibilities. The other three goals on which there was disagreement were the following: the enhancement of the student's mental, social and physical well-being; the preparation of students with the skills, habits and attitudes they would need in the world of work; and the development of an understanding of the responsibilities of active citizenship. Though rated as important in 1984, these three goals were viewed as a shared responsibility of society and the school.

A less marked disagreement with the 1978 division of duties was noted relative to another goal: the development of intellectual curiosity and a desire for lifelong learning. In 1978 the government considered it to be a shared responsibility of schools *and* society, however, in the 1984 questionnaire, almost half the respondents thought it should be a major school responsibility.

By and large, the picture emerging from the 1984 questionnaire is that of a general education. Schools should emphasize the acquisition of critical thinking and communication skills, and mastery of conventional subject content. In cooperation with the family and other community agencies, schools should also assist each student to develop a positive self-concept through a realistic appraisal of personal capabilities and limitations and a sense of community responsibility.

The Gallup poll also questioned Albertans about educational goals, but only offered a list of five for rating. Gallup respondents placed first the goal of preparing students for the world of work, ahead of such choices as those related to appreciating the value of tradition and individual rights. Job preparation also came first for the students surveyed in the opinionnaire, but communication skills were close behind. It is worth noting that the 1984 questionnaire respondents rated preparation for the world of work ninth of the sixteen goals.

Remembering that the questionnaire's response came from a disproportionately large number of parents and teachers, and that the Gallup poll contained a more representative cross-section of the adult population, the results of the three surveys can be summarized as they relate to goals of education, as follows: there was consensus that schools should concentrate primarily on the conventional subjects while promoting personal growth and civic values in cooperation with society. But, while the general public and students preferred that the schools prepare them for the world of work, parents and teachers wanted a broader general curriculum.

In their briefs, their letters, and their responses to a section provided in the questionnaire for personal comments, Albertans contributed their own ideas on educational goals. Among the goals most frequently mentioned by those answering the questionnaire were the development of a sense of self-worth and self-respect, the

acquisition of moral values and religious knowledge, the development of respect for others, and the fostering of participatory citizenship.

From the briefs and letters came goals such as the following: to promote independent thinking among students, and to develop graduates with a social conscience and with aesthetic sensitivity. Other briefs called for education about disarmament and the peaceful resolution of conflict. The response to some questionnaire questions reinforced this interest in developing a world view: 77 per cent of the respondents felt, for example, that students need to know more about the traditions of other cultures and countries.

Other briefs presented concerns about rapid social change. Their authors felt that schools should prepare students to deal with change by encouraging the view that education is a lifelong process. Again, the questionnaire rating reinforced this concern.

PART

III

ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED OF SECONDARY STUDENTS

It was clear from the responses to the Secondary Education Review that Albertans expected the school system to place a high priority on the acquisition of knowledge and skills peculiar to each subject. But they also indicated that certain learning outcomes were important and should be integrated across all subject areas: critical thinking skills, analysis, problem-solving skills, and the ability to distinguish among fact, fiction and propaganda.

However, Albertans also expressed concerns about ethics and values. Gallup poll respondents placed great importance on acquiring a standard of values and knowledge of the difference between right and wrong. Respect for the rights of others, a sense of fair play, and knowledge of the moral, value and religious systems of other cultures, emerged from the briefs and open response section of the questionnaire as desirable outcomes of the secondary school system.

Some briefs also stressed the importance of developing a positive self-concept. For example, students should be self-accepting, self-disciplined, self-confident, and realistic in appraising personal abilities and limitations. As well, they should be compassionate, and open to lifelong learning and change.

Traditional concepts of citizenship were also advanced as desirable objectives, along with a broader concept of an interdependent world. Some Albertans wanted the curriculum to include explanations of Canadian democratic government and individual citizen's rights and responsibilities; others felt that experiences in public speaking, debating and decision-making would provide valuable preparation for civic involvement. Still other Albertans wanted students to become aware of social issues facing Canada and the world.

Among the wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes which some Albertans felt should be fostered in the secondary schools were the following:

- willingness to take personal responsibility for preserving the environment through the wise use of natural resources;
- awareness of Canada's geography and ecology;
- positive attitude towards fitness, health and safety;
- understanding of technology and its impact on social change;
- participation in and exposure to the fine arts;

— good work habits;

— understanding of today's world including an historical perspective;

— understanding of the uses and limitations of science with emphasis on practical and experimental skills and knowledge;

— development of general mathematical skills, especially the practical application of mathematics;

— appreciation of the role of the family.

Albertans were asked which subjects should be part of the core (mandatory) curriculum, which should be options (electives), and which do not belong in the publicly funded schools at all.

Language arts was most often cited in the Gallup poll and the questionnaire as the subject which should be mandatory for both junior and senior high school programs, with mathematical skills close behind, followed by social studies, personal fitness, and preventative alcohol and drug abuse education. In the junior high program, respondents also included as mandatory general science, sex and family life education, and nutrition. Career planning was the only other subject considered compulsory in the senior program. No consensus emerged in support of any other subjects being mandatory though strong minority views were voiced. Although there was no agreement on any one particular science, many briefs indicated that science should be mandatory in both secondary school programs.

Language Arts

In each broad subject area, some specialties were rated higher than others. Within language arts, for example, reading and writing were considered most important, with grammar and spelling next, followed by listening and speaking. All these, in the majority view, should be mandatory. But there was little public support for compulsory instruction in other aspects of language arts; namely, literature and drama appreciation, and viewing. However, there was more support for viewing as a mandatory component in junior high school than in senior, and more support from questionnaire respondents than from those answering the Gallup poll.

In the student opinionnaire, Alberta students placed the study of literature for enjoyment in the bottom five objectives of the 82 listed in 1984. However, they rated effective writing third most important.

The basic message was that language arts was considered to more important because of its practical applications rather than its aesthetic values.

Mathematics

Similarly, when mathematics was broken down into its components, problem-solving and computation both rated much more

highly as mandatory subjects in secondary programs than did theoretical mathematics. For example, 97 per cent of questionnaire respondents regarded problem-solving skills as a mandatory component of the junior high program, but only 53 per cent of the same group saw theoretical mathematics as mandatory.

Social Studies/Social Sciences

Within social studies, the public clearly indicated that Canadian history was to be included: 92 per cent of questionnaire respondents felt it should be mandatory in the junior high program; and 80 per cent in the senior high program. The Gallup response was less supportive, but the majority still favoured making Canadian history mandatory. In addition, consensus emerged from the two surveys that other elements of social studies, such as world history, geography, current events, and comparative governments, should be compulsory in both junior and senior high programs. However, slightly more than half those surveyed felt that the study of contemporary social problems should not be mandatory in either level of the secondary school program.

The study of economics occasioned an interesting division: just over half the questionnaire respondents felt that this subject should not be mandatory in the junior high program, while 58 per cent of the Gallup pollees felt that it should be. Both groups felt it should be mandatory in the senior high program.

In some briefs, a case was made for more emphasis on Canadian and world history, while other briefs suggested that the current social studies program placed too much stress on values clarification or on government, economics and social problems, particularly at the junior high level.

Science

Albertans were ambivalent about including science as a compulsory subject. As far as general science was concerned, both adult surveys indicated it should be mandatory in the junior high program (73 per cent of questionnaire respondents and 66 per cent of the Gallup poll). But in regard to such specializations as chemistry, physics and biology, Albertans were fairly evenly divided over whether they ought to be mandatory or optional. As for senior high, there was also divided opinion on the mandatory or optional status of these specializations as well as general science. Other scientific subjects, such as agriculture and ecology, were regarded as optional courses at both levels.

In several briefs, Albertan expressed concern that the practical applications of science be included and that the content be kept current. Although there was no agreement on any one particular science, many briefs indicated that science should be mandatory in both secondary school programs.

Health Education and Personal Development

The public also agreed that some components of the health program should be mandatory. Personal fitness received strong support from adult Albertans as a compulsory aspect for both secondary school programs. There was also consensus for compulsory preventative drug and alcohol abuse education in both junior and senior high.

Sex and family life education also drew the support of a narrow majority for inclusion in the junior high, but not in the senior high mandatory program. However, 11 per cent of questionnaire respondents did not want it taught at either level. On the other hand, approximately 77 per cent of the students surveyed by the opinionnaire thought that offering a sex education course was "important" to "extremely important".

The teaching of nutrition, according to the surveys, ought to be mandatory in the junior high and optional in the senior high programs, while the acquisition of recreational or leisure skills should, in the opinion of most adults, be optional throughout the secondary school.

Some of the briefs reinforced the importance of alcohol and drug abuse education, and 80 per cent of the students surveyed in 1984 rated a drug and alcohol abuse course as "important" to "extremely important".

Languages Other Than English

The consensus regarding languages other than English was that these belonged in the secondary school curriculum, but as options. The issue was important enough for a third of those responding to the open response section of the questionnaire to raise it on their own initiative. They suggested that as additional languages, Alberta schools ought to teach, among others, Spanish, Latin, Russian, Chinese, Cree and other Native tongues.

French drew substantial support in both adult surveys as a mandatory subject. Most respondents, however, felt it belonged as an option in both junior and senior high school. In the Gallup poll, approximately 8 per cent felt that French should not be offered at all. And while some briefs opposed French immersion schools in times of economic restraint, others called for French to become a compulsory subject in all elementary and secondary schools.

German and Ukrainian were overwhelmingly endorsed as options. However, a significant number of those surveyed in the Gallup poll felt that Ukrainian (20 to 22 per cent) and German (15 to 19 per cent) were unnecessary subjects in publicly funded schools.

Fine Arts

The fine arts received strong support in the briefs from those who felt either that students ought to be able to specialize in these areas in senior high school, or that all students could benefit from these subjects. These briefs suggested that fine arts should be mandatory, but this notion found little support on the surveys.

The evidence of the surveys was that Albertans viewed the fine arts as worthwhile but not crucial; that is, as optional, not mandatory. As many as 16 per cent of the questionnaire's respondents and 10 per cent of Gallup pollees felt that performing skills should not be part of the fine arts program in publicly funded secondary schools.

Industrial Education, Business Education and Home Economics

In this booklet, "vocational training" refers to specialized job training, while "practical life skills" are those skills needed by most people in their daily lives. In both surveys, Albertans were asked to determine whether either type of skills training within industrial education, business education or home economics should be mandatory or optional.

The questionnaire respondents were less inclined to see vocational training as a mandatory component, and more inclined than Gallup poll respondents to view it as having no place in the schools at all. For example, the questionnaire revealed only 13 per cent in favour of including the vocational training aspect of industrial education in the junior high core, while 34 per cent of Gallup respondents indicated that it should be mandatory. Although 19 per cent of questionnaire respondents wanted the vocational training aspect of industrial education left out of junior high entirely, only 5 per cent of the Gallup respondents felt the same way.

There was considerably more support in both surveys for teaching the practical life skills aspect of industrial education, business education, or home economics, when intended for use in everyday life rather than as training for specific jobs. Gallup poll respondents were more inclined to see practical life skills training as a mandatory component than were the questionnaire respondents. For example, while the Gallup poll indicated 55 per cent in favour of mandatory practical life skills training in industrial education in senior high schools, only 34 per cent of questionnaire respondents agreed.

Some briefs expressed the view that schools ought to provide all students with practical life skills through compulsory subjects in basic business practice, money management, and interpersonal and family relations.

Regarding job training skills, however, the clear message of the

surveys was that these belonged in the school curriculum only as options.

Work Experience and Career Planning

Work experience also revealed a division between the views of the questionnaire respondents and those of the Gallup poll. The former felt it should be optional at both levels, with a sizable minority (30 per cent) having stated that it should not be in the junior high curriculum at all. Gallup poll respondents, on the other hand, wanted it as a mandatory subject in senior high (55 per cent for mandatory, 41 per cent for optional), and narrowly preferred it as an option in the junior high curriculum. Students surveyed by the opinionnaire also wanted work experience. They rated it ninth out of 82 objectives in the 1984 survey (though it is worth noting that, in 1973, they rated it third).

Career planning, too, drew more support as a mandatory component on the Gallup results than on the questionnaire. Still, majorities of both groups wanted it to be mandatory in the senior high program. They tended to include it in the junior high optional program. The student opinionnaire also revealed strong support for career counselling.

In another question, 94 per cent of Gallup poll respondents thought that secondary schools should provide career development services and that these services should be offered by trained counsellors, not regular teachers.

Religious Studies

Religious studies was supported as an option by the majority of respondents, but this subject also attracted sizable minorities (a third on the questionnaire, a quarter on the Gallup poll) who did not want denominational studies taught in high school at all, not even as an option. Albertans were asked to consider three forms of religious studies: denominational, world religions, and moral and ethics instruction. Of these, moral and ethics instruction received more support as a mandatory component although most adults generally favoured all three forms as options. Students, on the other hand, rated several religious objectives among the least important on the list of 82 objectives presented in the 1984 opinionnaire.

Computer Literacy/Computer Science

Judging from the opinion suveys, there was no consensus for computer studies to be either a mandatory or optional subject. Those replying to the questionnaire preferred it in the junior high mandatory and the senior high optional programs, but by only narrow margins in

both cases. The Gallup response was to view computer studies as an option at both levels, again by only slight margins.

Some Alberta students, in responding to an open-ended question on the opinionnaire, called for more emphasis on computers, and several of the briefs were in agreement.

Summary

In summary, Albertans felt that the mandatory programs for both levels of secondary school ought to comprise the practical language arts, mathematics, social studies, personal fitness and preventative alcohol and drug abuse education. In the junior, but not the senior mandatory program, family life and sex education, general science, and nutrition were included. Albertans also agreed that career planning should be mandatory in the senior high program. Many briefs would add science to the mandatory program in senior high, although they did not specify which science.

Albertans were ambivalent about whether physics, chemistry, biology and computer studies belonged in the secondary school as mandatory or as optional courses. As well, there was no consensus on work experience programs.

In the optional program for both junior and senior levels, however, Albertans clearly favoured languages other than English, agriculture, ecology, the fine arts, religious studies, and a range of vocational and practical life skills training in areas such as industrial arts, business education and home economics.

PART

IV

How Students Learn Best

Albertans were asked if the present system of education in secondary schools facilitated learning. The public responded to concerns on the division of secondary education into junior and senior high schools, graduation requirements, evaluation procedures, methods of advancement, attendance regulations, and support services. While Albertans generally supported the present procedures for implementing educational services, there was considerable interest in a system which offered more alternatives, especially when these were designed to meet the needs of exceptional students.

Junior high schools proved to be a topic of importance to many individuals and organizations, largely because they felt students in these grades have special characteristics. While it is true that a few briefs called for the elimination of junior high (placing Grades 7 and 8 in elementary schools and Grade 9 in the senior high school), the questionnaire showed a majority in favour of retaining the current division.

Several briefs suggested reasons for the high interest in retaining junior high schools. The young adolescent in junior high is emotional, vulnerable, easily bored, and has a strong need for group acceptance, recognition and self-esteem. Students in junior high demonstrate unique behavior because they develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually at widely varying rates. Volatile as individuals, in classroom groups these students were regarded as very sensitive to peer pressure and as presenting special teaching challenges.

Many briefs called for flexibility in teaching styles and for specialized junior high teachers, specially prepared in curriculum development, group dynamics, leadership techniques, constructive approaches to discipline, and communications skills.

Some Albertans felt that junior high school courses should place less emphasis on the learning of abstract concepts, stressing instead their practical applications. Experiential learning and hands-on approaches were also suggested. Others warned against too much specialization.

Albertans were concerned that the senior high school program was not preparing students to think for themselves. In some briefs, it was indicated that senior high studies were not sufficiently rigorous, while others suggested that programs were too difficult and too broad. Some Albertans thought that the programs of studies must be relevant to

future needs, and requested regular and thorough updating of curriculum content rather than simply additions to the present curriculum.

The questionnaire revealed widespread support for programs tailored to meet the needs of exceptional students. Three-quarters of the respondents approved programs for the gifted, and 84 per cent supported special opportunities for the learning disabled. Thus, there was support for a system flexible enough to give special consideration to the students at the intellectual extremes. However, approximately half of the students polled by the opinionnaire thought it was "useless" or "of little importance" to provide special classes in which students were grouped on the basis of intelligence.

A few briefs proposed ways of helping children with exceptional needs. For the learning disabled, it was recommended that teachers and counsellors receive specialized preparation, and that material resources be augmented. For gifted children, enrichment activities were suggested, including access to correspondence and university courses. Some briefs suggested that exceptional children be offered more appropriate programs, which would allow them to advance through the conventional curriculum at their individual rates. Generally, Albertans wanted programs to focus as much as possible on the individual student's personal and academic growth.

There was considerable desire for more flexible methods to allow students to advance through the secondary school program. Instead of having them grouped by age, advancing through grades at simultaneous yearly intervals, some Albertans felt each student should be allowed to advance at his or her own speed. However, 72 per cent of questionnaire respondents did not want to abolish the present system of grades and only 46 per cent agreed that students should be allowed to progress at their own speed. Most students (71 per cent of opinionnaire respondents), on the other hand, felt it was "important" to "extremely important" for schools to allow them to progress at their own speed. Several briefs suggested challenge examinations were a way of providing this. Others wanted mandatory subjects offered at two levels of difficulty.

On the issue of learning outside the classroom, no consensus was apparent. Fully 90 per cent of the senior high school students surveyed by the opinionnaire though it "important" to "extremely important" for schools to offer them work experience related to one or more of their school subjects. Respondents to the questionnaire (59 per cent) and the Gallup poll (92 per cent) agreed that secondary students should be allowed to receive part of their schooling through practical experience in the workplace. On the question of allowing students to obtain part of their schooling through home study, 46 per cent of questionnaire respondents approved.

The Carnegie Unit is the current way of awarding senior high school credits based on the number of instructional hours spent on that subject and successful achievement. For example, a minimum of

25 hours of classroom instruction must be scheduled for each credit (time-on-task). Again, many briefs argued that time-on-task does not equal mastery and suggested challenge tests to permit students to move ahead and obtain the credits whether they spent more or less than the allotted time-on-task.

In addition, Albertans generally rejected suggestions of lengthening either the school day or year. Currently, secondary students spend between 1,500 to 1,600 minutes per week in school.

Concern that bright students might graduate before they were emotionally or socially mature if challenge tests were permitted prompted some Albertans to advocate compulsory attendance until the current school leaving age of 16. Other briefs preferred that school leaving be based solely on achievement. Three-quarters of the questionnaire's respondents also approved compulsory attendance until completion of program requirements.

In the briefs, the majority of Albertans indicated that the requirements for Grade 12 graduation, either for the general or the advanced diploma, were generally acceptable. However, 60 per cent of the questionnaire respondents thought they were too low.

The current graduation requirements are only a year old. Previously, diplomas were awarded on the basis of school-assigned marks and the accumulation of 100 credits. But diploma examinations were reintroduced last year, requiring those seeking a general diploma to pass the English 30 or 33 diploma examination prepared by Alberta Education. Those seeking an advanced diploma must pass externally prepared diploma examinations in English 30, Mathematics 30, Social Studies 30, and one of Physics 30, Chemistry 30, or Biology 30. The marks from these examinations count for 50 per cent of a student's final mark, the other 50 per cent comes from the school.

Judging from Gallup poll results, most Albertans felt such examinations provided better evaluation of student achievement. They also thought diploma examinations would result in students making a greater effort to succeed. Some Albertans suggested that examinations also be used to determine entrance into senior high school.

On the other hand, senior high school students (58 per cent of opinionnaire respondents) rated diploma examinations as either "useless" or "of little importance" as a standardized means of testing achievement. In their open-ended responses, some students suggested diploma examinations which carried less weight, say 30 per cent instead of 50 per cent, in their final marks would be preferable. Students also complained they had not been adequately prepared for their examinations.

Some briefs expressed opposition to diploma examinations because they put too much emphasis on academic achievement, to the detriment of other subjects and programs. Other opponents felt they were poor methods of evaluation. On the other hand, some briefs commended the uniformity of evaluation and the challenge these examinations provide.

Albertans also generally approved of the subjects that have been designed as part of the mandatory program, though many felt there should be more compulsory subjects. They wanted the ratio of mandatory to optional subjects increased to approximately 70:30.

In the same vein, modifications were suggested in several briefs to make optional courses more standardized. At present, provincial course outlines cover only some options, while others are created locally to match community needs and resources. Some Albertans thought local options should be eliminated or de-emphasized, particularly in junior high school. In sum, many Albertans appeared to regard the core academic subjects as the primary focus of schooling and the options as less important. On the other hand, there was strong feeling expressed in the briefs that only a good optional program could provide the flexibility needed to meet the needs of individual youths.

The majority of respondents to both surveys supported the concept of providing different diplomas for completion of different programs. Also in line with this perceived need for flexibility, 55 per cent of questionnaire respondents supported the idea of an additional "special education" or "occupational" diploma for those students not able to meet general diploma requirements. But many Albertans opposed the idea, feeling that the diploma should convey a certain standard of academic achievement. Another suggestion was to offer one diploma only, but to include on it a description of the program completed, and even the marks received in each subject.

Many Albertans voiced a need for adequate support services. Counselling services were seen as especially important, particularly in light of the prospect of various career changes throughout a student's lifetime and the general uncertainty of the future. Students themselves rated career counselling sixth out of 82 objectives, and adequate library services fourth, in 1984. Personal counselling was given less weight, but 79 per cent of the students responding to the opinionnaire still rated it from "important" to "extremely important".

PART

V

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EDUCATION

Many segments of society have influence over secondary education: parents, Alberta Education, teachers, and business and industry, to name a few. Albertans, however, were ambivalent about the way the responsibilities have been and should be shared among these groups, and whether they should be centralized or decentralized. The public appeared to approve of the latter in principle, yet found many tasks for Alberta Education to perform.

Almost half (49 per cent) of adults surveyed by Gallup felt local parent/teacher associations should have more say in education. Another 20 per cent would give a stronger influence to Alberta Education, and 16 per cent to locally-elected school officials. The present balance was considered fine by 10 per cent and 5 per cent did not express an opinion. Yet approximately 90 per cent of the questionnaire respondents wanted Alberta Education to continue setting achievement standards for the mandatory subjects in secondary schools, and roughly 60 per cent wanted Alberta Education to set the standards for options as well.

Generally, Albertans felt that parents should be more involved in educating their children. But almost half the Gallup poll respondents had no contact with their local schools and only 30 per cent had five or more hours of contact per year.

Many Albertans felt parents and communities needed to have more influence with their local school systems, and suggested that this might be effected by advisory councils made up of parents and community leaders. Some briefs suggested that schools, especially those for special education students, would benefit from better liaisons with representatives of labour and business and industry.

The community school concept was heartily endorsed by some of those submitting briefs because they were perceived as fostering an integration of the school and society. Such schools, claimed their supporters, bring adults from the neighbourhood into the classroom not only to teach life skills and cultural heritage, but to learn through adult education programs. Partnerships between the school and community were seen as mutually beneficial to both the school and the community.

The central role of the teacher was recognized by many Albertans who, therefore, felt teaching standards to be central concern. On the opinionnaire, the students rated two objectives related to good

teaching among their top ten: that teachers should present their objectives clearly and that they should use a variety of teaching aids.

Some Albertans suggested that Alberta Education assume a leadership role in raising teaching standards. One suggested method was to give the university education faculties more feedback about the performance of their graduates and to encourage them to raise their admission standards. A second was to raise standards for certification and to require the periodic evaluation of teachers for recertification. Suggested criteria for such evaluation would be classroom performance and teacher efforts to upgrade their skills and knowledge. The need for teacher upgrading, in fact, was a recurrent theme in the briefs, especially in the areas of constructive approaches to discipline, understanding adolescence, individualizing education to suit exceptional students, and utilizing technology to enhance learning. It was noted frequently that the ultimate responsibility for upgrading and inservice rests with the teacher.

Lowering the student/teacher ratio and having teachers offer instruction within their specialties were advanced as means of improving teacher performance.

The primary role of the teacher which emerged from this review was that of a facilitator of learning, not a disseminator of knowledge.

Universities, in addition to preparing teachers, were also recongized as having strong influence on secondary education — too strong, some felt. A few Albertans thought that universities, by complaining about the quality of their freshmen's writing and mathematical skills, had pressured the secondary school system into undue emphasis on academic subjects at the expense of a general education. In this regard, one submission noted the small proportion, just one fifth, of high school graduates who proceed to higher education.

In the matter of funding, Albertans appeared to be fairly satisfied. The Gallup poll revealed, for example, that 44 per cent thought present spending levels ($3,000 to $4,000 a year per pupil) were appropriate; 20 per cent thought them too high; 11 per cent too low; and 25 per cent had no opinion. Answering a related question, 44 per cent thought the quality of secondary education justified the expense, while 35 per cent felt it did not, and 21 per cent did not know. While 29 per cent of the Gallup poll respondents called for increased provincial or municipal taxes in order to maintain current education levels, another 20 per cent thought the government should spend more, but that revenue should come from other government departments; 15 per cent thought staff cuts could provide more program funding, and fully 36 per cent called for holding the line on any tax increases. If more money were available, declared a few briefs, it should be spent in rural districts with low municipal tax bases.

While some Albertans offered suggestions on ways to reduce costs, particularly in the administrative area, others recommended that sufficient funding be made available at the beginning of any new initiative. Several briefs cited the social studies inservice as an example of how a new program should be introduced.

PART

VI

SUMMARY

Albertans want their school system to facilitate the intellectual, emotional, moral and physical growth of their children. They see most of these goals as shared responsibilities, with parents and other social institutions reserving to the school system the primary responsibility for intellectual development.

In relation to the schools' responsibility, Albertans feel that students should master a body of knowledge and skills in a fairly conventional range of subjects, but that they also should learn how to think critically. Thus, all students would graduate with a range of competencies by acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes in mandatory subjects, the most important being language arts, especially reading and writing. They would also have learned how to make informed decisions, and how to continue learning throughout their lives.

Many Albertans are concerned about preparing students for the world of work. To some, this means teaching skills related to specific jobs; to others it means teaching general work-related skills which will enable them to cope with and adapt to the uncertainty and constant changes of the future. Also, the probability that frequent career changes will occur in a student's lifetime must not be overlooked: it is of particular importance to prepare students for this eventuality.

Albertans want their children to develop a system of values that stresses respect for human rights and civic duties, and to become acquainted with the cultures and religions of the world.

The junior high schools, in particular, should be flexible, with staff well prepared for the individuality of their adolescent charges. Their curriculum should be practical and experiential.

The compulsory component of the secondary school program should be increased. Communication skills, especially reading and writing, are rated the most important for students to learn. Mathematical skills come second. Albertans also see social studies, especially Canadian history, and such components of the health curriculum as personal fitness and alcohol and drug abuse education, as crucial enough to be part of the secondary school mandatory program. In addition, general science, family life and sex education, and nutrition should be compulsory in junior high. Career planning also should be mandatory in the senior high program. Many briefs indicate that science should be mandatory in senior high school, but they do not agree on which science.

Options should continue to be offered in such areas as fine arts, languages other than English, religious studies, and vocational and life skills training, but Alberta Education should maintain tighter control over all options than it does presently.

The grade structure and the division between junior and senior high schools should be retained, as should compulsory attendance. But many Albertans think that achievement, not age, should determine when students may leave the system, and that gifted students especially should be allowed to advance at their own speed. So, too, should learning disabled students, without the stigma of failure.

Steps should be taken to enhance the quality of teaching: by raising entrance standards in faculties of education; by requiring in-service training; by raising certification standards; or by requiring periodic evaluation of teachers for recertification.

Although most Albertans affirm the role of the province in specifying the content and standards of achievement for instructional programs, the public also wants the local community to be more involved in decisions that affect secondary education.

In summary, Albertans are generally satisfied with the present secondary school system but would like to see graduates with better communication skills. As well, students should be given more moral training and instruction in various life skills, and be encouraged to develop a greater ability to think independently and critically. Albertans feel it is important that the secondary school assist students to develop their potential and by so doing to become lifelong learners, capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

APPENDIX

A

BRIEFS FROM GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

1. Alberta Teachers' Association
2. Calgary Board of Education Senior High School Principals' Association
3. Christian Schools International, District 11, Curriculum Office
4. Home Economics Curriculum Coordinating Committee
5. Fine Arts Consultants' Council
6. County of Flagstaff (briefs received at three Public Hearings)
7. Calgary Board of Education, Continuing Education Services Department
8. Grande Prairie Women's Residence Association
9. Jack James Secondary School, Calgary Board of Education
10. Medicine Hat School District No. 76
11. Calgary Board of Education Social Studies Department Heads
12. County of Leduc No. 25 Board of Education
13. Lethbridge Collegiate Institute
14. Staff of Camrose Composite High School
15. Alberta Municipal Affairs
16. A Group of Nanton Area Citizens
17. Calgary Board of Education Secondary (Academic/Occupational) School Principals
18. English 20 Class, Ardrossan Junior-Senior High School
19. Calgary Board of Education Work Experience Teacher Advisory Committee
20. County of Mountain View No. 17 School Administrators
21. Camrose and County Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities
22. Willow Creek School Division No. 28 Board of Trustees
23. Calgary Board of Education Work Experience Advisory Committee
24. Alberta Agriculture
25. Calgary Board of Education Business Education Advisory Committee
26. Alberta Environment, Communications Division
27. Alberta Tourism and Small Business

28. Alberta Economic Development, Planning and Services
29. Calgary Board of Education Home Economics Teachers
30. Calgary Board of Education Junior High School Principals' Association
31. Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education
32. Alberta Labour
33. Project Ploughshares Education Committee, Calgary
34. Health and Physical Education Curriculum Coordinating Committee
35. Alberta Education, Special Education Services
36. Canadian Parents for French, Alberta Branch
37. Edmonton Catholic Schools Ukrainian Bilingual Parent Advisory Society
38. Creation Science Association of Alberta
39. UNICEF Canada National Development Education Committee
40. Interdepartmental Community School Committee
41. Science Education Consultant Council on Secondary School Science Education in Alberta
42. Alberta Public Health Association
43. Education Curriculum and Instruction 472 Students, Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta
44. Caritas High School Staff, Edmonton
45. Alberta-Mackenzie Council, Catholic Women's League of Canada
46. Calgary Hire-A-Student Committee
47. Physicians for Social Responsibility, The Canadian Medical Coalition for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Alberta Chapter, Edmonton Branch
48. Industrial Education Curriculum Coordinating Committee
49. Edmonton Public Schools
50. Rosebud School of the Arts
51. The University of Calgary Senate
52. Alberta Vocational Centre, Edmonton
53. Alberta Utilities and Telecommunications
54. Lethbridge Catholic Separate School District No. 9 School Board
55. Medicine Hat High School Technical Staff
56. Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta
57. M.E. Lazerte Community School Advisory Committee
58. Calgary Board of Education, Division of Instruction Leadership Group
59. Ad Hoc Group of Librarians from Zone Four
60. Alberta Federation of Women United for Families
61. Business Education Curriculum Coordinating Committee
62. Alberta Workers' Health, Safety and Compensation, Occupational Health and Safety Division

63. County of Lac Ste. Anne No. 28 Board of Education
64. Calgary Academy
65. Lethbridge School District No. 51 Board of Trustees
66. Lethbridge School District No. 51 Secondary School Principals
67. Graduate Class, Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta
68. Fort McMurray Public School District No. 2833
69. Conference of Alberta School Superintendents
70. Willow Creek Peace and Development Group
71. Business Education Department, Salisbury Composite High School, County of Strathcona No. 20
72. Association canadienne-francaise de l'Alberta
73. Alberta Association for Bright Children, Strathcona County Chapter
74. Grande Prairie Composite High School
75. Curriculum Policies Committee
76. Alberta Manpower
77. Mathematics Curriculum Coordinating Committee
78. 1984 Provincial Agricultural Service Board Conference: Resolutions on "Updating Agricultural Curriculum in Elementary and High Schools"
79. Social Studies Curriculum Coordinating Committee
80. Alberta Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities
81. Foothills School Division No. 38
82. County of Parkland No. 31
83. Legal Resource Centre, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta
84. Alberta Social Services and Community Health
85. Red Deer Public School District No. 104
86. Northern Alberta Development Council
87. St. John Ambulance — Alberta Council
88. Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, Leisure Education Committee
89. Ad Hoc Group of Instructors and Consultants in the Practical Arts
90. Alberta Recreation and Parks
91. Calgary Area Educators: A Brief on English Language Arts
92. City of Calgary, Personnel Services Department
93. Home Economics Specialist Council, Alberta Teachers' Association
94. Broxton Park School, A Student Committee, Spruce Grove
95. Health and Physical Education Council, Alberta Teachers' Association
96. Alberta Energy and Natural Resources

97. County of Strathcona No. 20 Board of Education
98. County of Mountain View No. 17 Education Council Committee
99. University of Alberta Hospitals School of Nursing
100. Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1
101. Library Association of Alberta, Government Relations Committee
102. Edmonton Catholic Schools
103. Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta
104. County of Beaver No. 9 Superintendent's Advisory Committee
105. Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired
106. Ukrainian Bilingual Association
107. Prairie Bible Institute
108. Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
109. Fairview School Division No. 50
110. Church of God in Christ, Mennonite
111. Learning Resources Council, Alberta Teachers' Association
112. Alberta Cultural Heritage Council
113. County of Camrose No. 22
114. Calgary Public Local No. 38, Alberta Teachers' Association
115. Western Industrial Research and Training Centre
116. Boilermakers Union Local Lodge 146
117. City of Edmonton, Fire Department

APPENDIX

B

GOALS OF BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALBERTA

Goals of Schooling

Schooling, as part of education, accepts primary and distinctive responsibility for specific goals basic to the broader goals of education. Programs and activities shall be planned, taught and evaluated on the basis of these specific goals in order that students:

— Develop competencies in reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing.

— Acquire basic knowledge and develop skills and attitudes in mathematics, the practical and fine arts, the sciences, and the social studies (including history and geography), with appropriate local, national, and international emphasis in each.

— Develop the learning skills of finding, organizing, analyzing, and applying information in a constructive and objective manner.

— Acquire knowledge and develop skills, attitudes and habits which contribute to physical, mental and social well-being.

— Develop an understanding of the meaning, responsibilities, and benefits of active citizenship at the local, national and international levels.

— Acquire knowledge and develop skills, attitudes, and habits required to respond to the opportunities and expectations of the world of work.

Because the above goals are highly interrelated, each complementing and reinforcing the other, priority ranking among them is not suggested. It is recognized that in sequencing learning activities for students some goals are emphasized earlier than others; however, in relation to the total years of schooling, they are of equal importance.

In working toward the attainment of its goals, the school will strive for excellence. However, the degree of individual achievement also depends on student ability and motivation as well as support from the home. Completion of diploma requirements is expected to provide the graduate with basic preparation for lifelong learning. Dependent on program choices, the diploma also enables job entry or further formal study.

Goals of Education

Achievement of the broader goals of education must be viewed as a shared responsibility of the community. Maximum learning occurs when the efforts and expectations of various agencies affecting children complement each other. Recognizing the learning that has or has not occurred through various community influences, among which the home is the most important, the school will strive to:

— Develop intellectual curiosity and a desire for lifelong learning.

— Develop the ability to get along with people of varying backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles.

— Develop a sense of community responsibility which embraces respect for law and authority, public and private property, and the rights of others.

— Develop self-discipline, self-understanding and a positive self-concept through realistic appraisal of one's capabilities and limitations.

— Develop an appreciation for tradition and the ability to understand and respond to change as it occurs in personal life and society.

— Develop skills for effective utilization of financial resources and leisure time and for constructive involvement in community endeavours.

— Develop an appreciation for the role of the family in society.

— Develop an interest in cultural and recreational pursuits.

— Develop a commitment to the careful use of natural resources and to the preservation and improvement of the physical environment.

— Develop a sense of purpose in life and ethical or spiritual values which respect the worth of the individual, justice, fair play and fundamental rights, responsibilities and freedoms.

The ultimate aim of education is to develop the abilities of individuals in order that they might fulfil their personal aspirations while making a positive contribution to society.